

SWIFTS

Some factual facts

- There are 87,000 pairs of swifts in the UK
- The numbers have fallen by about 50% since 1995
- Swifts are dark sooty brown all over, but can look black against the sky
- You'll hear their unmistakable, piercing, high-pitched 'scream' in full flight before you see them
- They feed exclusively on insects
- Swifts live for an average of 10 years and mate for life
- The eggs are incubated for between 19 to 25 days in simple nests
- By August the birds will have gone.

Some literary facts

- The tell-tale scream led them to once being nicknamed the Devil's bird.
- The poet Ted Hughes famously wrote of the birds – Look! They're back! Look!

Some amazing facts – in alphabetical order

1. **Feeding, mating and sleeping** – they do all three in the air!. They avoid coming anywhere near the ground; they can 'snooze' with one side of their brain at once, and then switch to the other side.
2. **Flight distance** – they fly across the Sahara desert in autumn and some even go as far south as South Africa, a distance of 6000 miles.
3. **Flight duration** – they can fly up to 500 miles a day on migration.
4. **Flight height** – they can comfortably coast at 10,000 feet even when sleeping.
5. **Flight speed** – no other bird can fly faster in level flight, with a recent study reporting a flight speed of 69.3 mph.
6. **Raising their young: feeding** - parent swifts gather insect snacks for their chicks, carrying as many as 1,000 at once which make a big bulge in their throat. Swifts can gather up to tens of thousands of insects daily when feeding chicks.
7. **Raising of their young: caring** - the parents fly into the nest openings (an inch by 2 inches) at speed, folding their wings on entry.
8. **The young preparing for flight** - chicks build up their flight muscles in the nest by performing 'press-ups' with their wings.
9. **The young's stamina** - after leaving the nest where they hatched, they'll keep flying non-stop for three years!

What order would you put these in?

Some nice facts

- **Swifts are unobtrusive** when nesting and make perfect, *quiet (once they're in!)* neighbours and leave few, if any, droppings below.
- **Sharing your house – or your church** - with swifts is a great privilege.

With thanks to an article by Joe Shute recently in the Daily Telegraph – What to spot – and the RSPB website <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/swift/>

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